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Collaborating across the researcher-practitioner divide: introducing John Dewey's democratic experimentalism

1. Introduction

The debate about the practical utility of academic research has been the subject of numerous articles, books, and special issues in academic journals (e.g. Journal of Management Inquiry, Vol. 6, No. 1; British Journal of Management, Vol. 12, Special Issue; Organization Studies, Vol. 31, No. 9-10; Management Learning Vol. 43 No. 4, Special Issue). The subject has been debated on both sides of the Atlantic, being the focus of three presidential speeches at the Annual Meetings of the Academy of Management in 1997, 1998, and 2000 and one keynote speech at the European Academy of Management in 2009. In the UK, the need for research to be useful to practice has been clearly articulated by the Research Excellence Framework (2014) under the banner of "impact".

Central to this debate is the divide between researchers and practitioners. Although knowledge generation by academics often claims to be inspired by real-life management problems, it has been seen by many as an endeavour separate from the practical knowledge held by practitioners (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Kelemen and Bansal, 2002). Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) identify two ways to frame this divide: one that involves the *transfer of knowledge* from academia to practitioners; and another that considers theory and practice as distinct yet complementary kinds of knowledge, conceiving the divide as a *knowledge production* problem. In line with the latter interpretation, many scholars have suggested that researchers should collaborate with practitioners in pursuit of knowledge that is both robust and relevant (e.g. Aldag, 1997; Mohrman et al., 2001). The argument is to bridge the researcher-practitioner divide by bringing them together in a joint effort of producing knowledge. Thus, a variety of new forms of scholarship in which academics and practitioners

co-produce knowledge have emerged. These include (amongst others) Mode 2 of knowledge production, design inquiry, engaged scholarship, relational scholarship, evidence-based management and dialogical models of knowledge production.

These forms of collaborative knowledge production provide suggestions about the mechanisms that make successful collaboration possible, including communication strategies and conflict management and resolution. In so doing, they emphasize strategies of collaboration but they do not engage with the principles that should guide the *relationship* between researchers and practitioners during the act of collaboration. In other words, they put forth different modes of collaboration for producing knowledge, in which concrete actions are suggested, but forget the relational aspect of those actions. One is left wondering, how practitioners and researchers should behave toward each other during such common endeavour?

We contribute to filling in this gap by introducing John Dewey's philosophy of democratic experimentalism. This is an experimental model for knowledge production that makes a two-fold contribution. It not only enables the production of rigorous and relevant knowledge, but it also places democratic relationships between academics and practitioners at the heart of knowledge co-creation processes. Dewey's work (1925[1981], 1927[1991], 1932[2008], 1938[1991], 1939[1988]) sees knowledge as deeply intertwined with experience and inquiry, and argues for a democratic form of collaboration between those who participate to the production of knowledge as a means of advancing theory that has practical consequences for humanity.

The article begins with a short review of the various forms of academic-practitioner strategies of collaboration before making the case for Dewey's democratic experimentalism as a distinct mode of knowledge co-production. It then proceeds with a discussion of the four

principles which underpin democratic experimentalism, before concluding with a discussion of potential limitations and criticisms and the opportunities the model offers to the management field.

2. The relationship between academics and practitioners in knowledge co-production: a review and synthesis

In this section, we provide a review and synthesis of various attempts to develop mechanisms for connection and collaboration across the academic and practitioner communities in their joint efforts to create new knowledge. These include, among others, collaborative forms of knowledge production, design inquiry and dialogical models (for a more detailed review see Kieser et al., 2015). Our literature review suggests that, with few exceptions, existing debates overlook the central role played by the relationship between academic and practitioners in the production of knowledge. Bartunek (2007) is amongst the few who argue that we must change the way we think about bridging academic-practitioner gaps by taking into account academics' relationships with practitioners in ways that go well beyond research per se. In addition, the need for democratic relationships between co-producers of knowledge is hardly acknowledged in the management literature. This is why Dewey's contribution is relevant and timely to our field.

2.1. Collaborative forms of knowledge production

Mode 2 research (Gibbons et al., 1994) was introduced to the management field by Tranfield and Starkey (1998) and Starkey and Madan (2001). The core feature of Mode 2 research is to increase the practical utility of academic research by bringing together varied stakeholders, including academics and practitioners, to solve practical problems. The strategy of collaboration here is to carry on the knowledge production process through contextual consensus as to what counts as appropriate methodology, research questions and modes of

engagement (Huff and Huff, 2001). In this process, Mode 2 calls for an interest in concrete and particular processes and issues rather than having a mere interest in theoretical contributions in the form of general, unifying principles (Gibbons et al., 1994).

Compared to Mode 2, *engaged scholarship* (van de Ven, 2007; van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) provides more concrete recommendations about how to carry out the collaborative process in terms of formulating research questions, forming a collaborative learning community of scholars and practitioners, employing multiple models and methods, and framing the research and its findings. The essence of the strategy of collaboration in engaged scholarship is to connect academics and practitioners in a common endeavour of arbitrage. Arbitrage is defined here as a strategy of making the best out of differences between the knowledge held by scholars and practitioners vis-a-vis a problem of interest.

Relational scholarship (Bartunek, 2007) is an enhanced version of engaged scholarship. It questions the plausibility of true collaborative research involving academics and practitioners, as scientific systems differ considerably from practitioner settings in terms of communication and problem solving activities (Kieser and Leiner, 2009). This is the only model that points out that existing modes of collaboration fail to guide the academic-practitioner relationship in collaborative knowledge production. However, it does not go far enough in providing specific guidelines. Its recommendations remain general, stating that academics and practitioners need to foster positive and mutual relationships, which require them to enter and understand each other's worlds and modes of knowing, as well as empathize with and appreciate the complexity of each other's experience and knowledge.

Evidence-based management (Rousseau, 2006, 2007; Rousseau and McCarthy, 2007; Briner at al, 2009) aims to close the gap between research and practice by "translating principles based on best evidence into organizational practices" (Rousseau, 2006, p. 256).

Rousseau (2006) argues that evidence based management is a useful decision making tool for managers: instead of drawing on personal opinions and unsystematic experience, they must use the best available evidence to support their actions and decisions. However, the concepts of evidence and fact are highly disputed in the management field by both academics and practitioners. While medicine and other disciplines have been successful in making evidence based practices the norm, our field lags behind. One reason is that evidence-based management does not address the relationship between researchers and practitioners in a direct and distinct way. It only seeks to ensure through various mechanisms that practitioners understand and embrace the language of research when they go about their day to day practice (Rynes et al., 2007).

2.2. Design inquiry

Another stream of work that has interrogated and, to some extent, challenged the ability of management studies to deliver relevance to practice is rooted in design science. Design science is defined as a "body of intellectually tough, analytic, partly formalizable, partly empirical, teachable doctrine about design process" (Simon, 1969, p. 58). While some commentators embrace the view that management research is a design science (van Aken, 2005), others suggest that design science offers a rather narrow perspective on management as a field of study (Pandza and Thorpe, 2010) because of its emphasis on prescriptive outcomes in management.

Despite existing controversies, two design approaches have become central to the debate about academic-practitioner gap in management: the human-centred design and the science-based design (Pascal et al., 2013). Human-centred design focuses on engaging both user-practitioners and researchers in the design process. Similar to the collaborative forms of knowledge production presented above, scholars from this perspective have put forth

different strategies of collaboration for an effective design process (Bate and Robert, 2007; Hatchuel, Lemasson and Weil, 2006; Plsek, Bibby and Whitby, 2007) and for the design of a collaborative team (Hodgkinson and Healy, 2008). This approach emphasizes the need to include both practitioners and researchers in an interactive and collaborative sense-making process. Science-based design (Hatchuel, 2001; Romme, 2003; Van Aken, 2004, 2005, 2007; March and Storey, 2008) is inspired by John Dewey's pragmatist platform. However, it limits the implications of Dewey's philosophy to the relationship between reflection and action, which are seen as intertwined (Dalsgaard, 2014), and to the ultimate objective of research which is to produce knowledge that can be used in designing solutions to field problems. This explains why the approach has been critiqued for its narrow understanding, poor exploration and application of pragmatist leanings (Avenier, 2010).

Further distinctions are postulated in the design literature between explanatory sciences and design sciences (van Aken, 2004, 2005), or between social science and design (Romme, 2003), which have been translated as the distinction between Organizational Theory and Management Theory (van Aken, 2004, 2005), or between the laboratory model and the field model (Hatchuel, 2001). Such distinctions are neither helpful to guide the relationship between academics and practitioners in knowledge co-production nor beneficial to bridging the gap between them, since they aim at separating the quest for universal truth (explanation and prescription) from the research objectives that are practice oriented.

In the 1970s, we witnessed a backlash against the narrow definition of design sciences with Rittel and Webber (1973) arguing that essential design problems are in fact "wicked problems" and they require much more than a scientific methodology, namely, political, cultural and social awareness and skills. Consequently, a *science of design* emerged that aimed to refine and advance existing design sciences (Avenier, 2010). Sciences of design

suggest bringing different research participants together to construct knowledge in an explicitly ethical and rigorous manner. But how this is to be achieved remains unexplored.

2.3. Dialogical models

Dialogical models are also inspired by the philosophy of pragmatism. In line with sciences of design, they explicitly deny the separation of theory from practice, arguing that these two arenas are deeply intertwined. Through inductive reasoning, conceptual generalization can identify meta-relations between categories; through abductive reasoning, it can also develop plausible explanations for the similarities and disparities between the various instances of the phenomenon studied (Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012).

With regard to the knowledge production process, these models do not deal with the academic-practitioner relationship, but emphasize dialogues between academics and practitioners as the mechanism for collaborative production of relevant knowledge. Drawing on pragmatic constructivism[1], Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba (2012) propose a dialogical model for developing academic knowledge for (and from) practice, with a focus on how to develop research questions that help to enhance research relevance for practice. Their dialogical principle proposes that the tension between different interests of participants be continually maintained during the dialogue, for this very tension enables heterogeneity and homogeneity to blossom. In a similar vein, Lorino et al. (2011) develop the dialogical mediated inquiry, a research method based on pragmatism, Vygotsky's theory of mediated activity and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. Inquiry, as described by Lorino et al. (2011), brings together logical thinking, narrative thinking and experimenting, while dialogism conceptualizes the production of meaning through the interactions of actors in a situated

[1] In pragmatic constructivism, knowledge generation aims at conceptualizing researchers' understanding of their flux of experience about the phenomena they investigate. More precisely researchers attempt to develop principles for organizing in an intelligible fashion the regularities they perceive in their flux of experience (Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012).

context. In dialogical mediated inquiry, meaning-making is made through dialogue which serves to manage tensions and diversity between researchers and practitioners. Thus, one potential problem is that researchers engaging in a dialogical model of doing research tend to be more attracted towards solving pressing practical problems and hence, drift away from building conceptual knowledge (Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012).

From the discussion above, it is apparent that the landscapes of management knowledge production provide a rather limited understanding of the nature of the *relationship* between researchers and practitioners during the collaborative knowledge production process. Joint research fosters academic-practitioner collaboration in some instances, but it is not a necessary or sufficient condition for developing joint relationships in which academics and practitioners truly learn from each other and develop both rigorous and relevant knowledge (Bartunek, 2007). In line with Romme et al. (2015) it is our contention that relational encounters between academics and practitioners are at the heart of successful collaborative projects that can integrate effectively multiple ways of knowing and practicing, establish common grounds (at least temporarily) among differing interests as well as a shared sense of purpose and responsibility. It is therefore important to extend our understandings of academic-practitioner collaboration more broadly. This requires a clearer understanding of the guiding principles that foster a mutual relationship in producing rigorous and relevant knowledge. These principles are the "tall and thick poles to prop up a big tent shielding us from the charge of poor rigor, low relevance, and consilience deficits" (Gulati, 2007, p. 779).

In what follows we make the case for John Dewey's democratic experimentalism. John Dewey was renowned for being one of the most controversial philosophy professors of his generation. He wrote extensively on many different subjects including philosophy, psychology, political science, education, aesthetics and the arts and has been described by

many commentators as a ‘man ahead of his time’ or indeed, as a man ‘still ahead of his time’ (Jones, 1999). His views and ideas are as pertinent today as they were a century ago and indeed, some of his concepts are so ground-breaking that certain scientific establishments are reluctant to engage with them.

Dewey’s democratic experimentalism aims to product rigorous and relevant knowledge through experimental inquiry; it also sees the relationship between researchers as practitioners as one of cooperation and coordination based on four principles: 1) organized intelligence (which emphasises equality among researchers and practitioners), 2) an attitude of openness toward the new, 3) democratic communication, and 4) a general willingness to let experience decide. Table 1 below summarizes the different ways researchers and practitioners collaborate with each other across the approaches reviewed above and how the perspective of John Dewey contributes to this debate in a distinctive way.

Insert Table 1 about here

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3. John Dewey’s democratic experimentalism

Along with Peirce and James, Dewey (1859 – 1952) was one of the most prominent classic pragmatist thinkers and pioneers (Bernstein, 2010). His pragmatist approach is distinguishable from others being usually referred to as “instrumentalism” or “experimentalism”. Dewey’s concern with democracy can be traced back to his work on “The public and its problems” in 1927. His account of democratic experimentalism has two prominent features that differentiate it from current modes of collaborative knowledge production: 1) it advances a notion of experimental inquiry which is embedded in an epistemology that transcends theory and practice and bridges the researcher-practitioner

divide, and 2) it upholds a democratic spirit that permeates the entire research process.

First, democratic experimentalism rejects the idea that science can access reality through a special method. Scientific method and the way in which we gain knowledge in our everyday lives are similar to each other (Dewey, 1938 [1991]). Dewey stresses that scientific inquiry and common sense inquiry share the same pattern, and that there is both methodological and content continuity between science and common sense inquiry. Materials for questions and criteria of judgment that are legitimate for knowledge production are available in ordinary experience.

Therefore, research and practice are practices on their own which have different possibilities and limitations, but must inform each other (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). Universal inclusion of academics and practitioners in experimental research is essential (Anderson, 2006). The purpose is to combine theoretical and practical knowledge in a unified whole, so that theories become relevant to organizational practice and practice becomes the starting and ending point of theorizing. In other words, the relationship between research and practice is one of cooperation and coordination, rather than one of application dictated by the dichotomy between organizational practice and organization research (Biesta and Burbules, 2003).

The starting point in experimental inquiry is a problematic situation emerging from our everyday life (Dewey, 1938 [1991]). This is because science does not have its own access to reality; it always has to go back to the immediate qualitative experience (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). In experimental inquiry, academics and practitioners solves problematic situations together by developing an experimental strategy in order to investigate the situation, thereby identifying the problem and hypothesising its possible solutions. In dealing with unfamiliar situation, their point of departure is always a hypothesis about what might be the

case. They then undertake certain operations of experimentation that "modify antecedently given existential conditions so that the results of the transformation are facts which are relevant in solution of a given problem" (Dewey, 1938 [1991], p. 498). These acts make changes, which reveal previously unperceived qualities and properties of the objects. An experiment represents the execution of one out of a number of alternative conceptions as possible plans of action. It results in consequences, which are observed within observable limits to serve as tests of the validity of the hypothesis acted upon (Dewey, 1938 [1991]).

From experimental inquiry, conclusions are reached in the forms of generalizations. Generalizations are of two forms: there are those which institute "a relation of including and included kinds", and there are those which institute "*if-then* hypotheses and theories" (Dewey, 1938 [1991]). The contents of abstract generalizations are determined in view of their final applicability when an occasion actually comes up. However, they are mere working hypotheses, not programs to be rigidly adhered to and executed. They are provisional in a Deweyan democracy because *"they will be entertained subject to constant and well-equipped observation of the consequences they entail when acted upon, and subject to read and flexible revision in the light of observed consequences"* (Dewey, 1927 [1991], p. 131).

Deweyan experimental inquiry is fundamentally local. He writes: "the local is the ultimate universal, as near an absolute as exists" (Dewey, 1927 [1991], p. 218). Thus, the conclusions of the experimental inquiry must be brought back to practice to be verified (Dewey, 1917[2000]). No scientific report would get a hearing if it did not describe the mechanism and procedure by which experiments were carried on and results obtained. The purpose is not to worship that process, but to tell other researchers how they work to get results. As the results may agree or disagree in their experience with those previously arrived at, the mechanism and procedure employed in the democratic experiment helps explain why

they confirm, modify and rectify the latter (Dewey, 1925[1981]). For Dewey, to verify a hypothesis means that the relation between actions and consequences specified in the hypothesis has actually happened, it does not mean to establish a statement that reality as hypothesized is indeed as reality is (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). Moreover, the widest possible range of application offer the best possibility for the deepest verification, because verification is repeatedly conducted in the new contexts in which the hypothesis is being tested or applied.

Second, the relationship between researchers and practitioners during the research process is seen as necessarily democratic. In Dewey's ideal, experimental inquiry and democratic behaviour are intertwined (Gouinlock, 1990). The democratic aspect of experimentalism requires appropriate behaviour of participants as well as adequate interaction and communication between them. Dewey (1916[1980], p. 87) states: *"a democracy is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to his own action to that of others, and to consider the actions of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving full import of their activity".*

Democracy is best suited to this process of experimenting for two reasons (Simon, 2011). On the one hand, democracy rejects the mental rigidity that inhibits adaptation to new experience, rendering conventions vulnerable to re-examination and challenge (Dewey, 1927 [1991]). In experimenting, researchers and practitioners put forth positions based on reasons, but they also go further to reconsider their claims in light of the reasons suggested by others. They not only learn from each other about ways of attaining their goals, but also are inspired to consider and reconsider their goals. On the other hand, democracy encourages and takes

into account a broad range of evidence and perspectives. As such, the process of experimenting maximizes the range of views and alternatives in formulating and solving problems. Democracy presupposes that our concerns must grow from what is local, spontaneous, voluntary, and direct (Pappas, 2008). Dewey says: *"I am inclined to believe that the heart and final guarantee of democracy is in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner… and in gatherings of friends in the living rooms of houses and apartments"* (1939[1988], p. 227).

4. Democracy as a relational act of collaboration between academics and practitioners

Dewey's democratic experimentalism sees experimental inquiry relying on four behavioural principles: 1) organized intelligence, 2) an attitude of hospitality toward the new, 3) democratic communication, and 4) a general willingness to let experience decide.

Organized intelligence (Morris, 1999) emphasizes equality among researchers and practitioners. It is described by Dewey as "a postulate in the sense of a demand to be realized: that each individual shall have the opportunity for release, expression, fulfilment, of his distinctive capacities, and that the outcome shall further the establishment of a fund of shared values" (Dewey, 1932 [2008], p. 350). Organized intelligence is similar to dialogism (Lorino et al., 2011) to the extent that it honours both the singularity and differences of its members while at the same time encourages the connection and commonality among them. It *"provides the only possible opportunity for all to develop rich and diversified experience, while also securing continuous cooperative give and take and intercommunication"* (Dewey, 1933 [2008], p. 101). Being present in the entire research process, from observation and hypotheses to testing, reformulation and mutual exchange between participants, it tends to result in a richer style of collaboration compared to dialogue.

Organized intelligence has a much broader implication than allowing everyone to speak. It acknowledges the unique contribution brought by each individual rather than the group, class, or culture he or she represents. Everyone is encouraged to develop his/her own unique voice and listen in a wholehearted manner, especially to those who speak against his/her beliefs (Pappas, 2008). Dewey writes: *"democracy is concerned not with freaks or geniuses or heroes or divine leaders, but with associated individuals in which each by intercourse with others somehow makes the life of each more distinctive"* (Dewey, 1919 [2000], pp. 46-47). In this sense, organized intelligence requires respect for others "as sources not only of their own values but also of insight for each other" (Weber, 2011, p. 102).

Second, *the attitude of hospitality toward the new* (Pappas, 2008), also embraced by relational scholarship, puts open mindedness and mutual understanding at the heart of the relationship between academics and researchers. Open-mindedness does not mean to blindly accept all ideas without intelligent critique (Rodgers, 2002). It means a willingness to consider different perspectives, together with a tolerance of the "possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us" (Dewey, 1933[2008], p. 30). As Dewey put it, it is a "willingness to let experiences accumulate and sink in and ripen" (Dewey, 1916[1980], p. 183).

Openness and mutual understanding makes it possible to embrace conflict and tension. In the discussion of engaged scholarship, conflict and tension tend to be managed through compromise and bargaining. What Dewey advocates is a deeper interaction. In democratic experiments, researchers and practitioners solve conflicts by discussing their values and interests, thereby re-examining their values and interests in light of those of others. It is more constructive than mere bargaining, where the end is reached through concessions and consensus. Dewey notes: democracy "*bring[s]... conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the*

light of more inclusive interests than are represented by [any] of them separately" (Dewey, 1939[2008], p. 56). Pappas (2008) describes Deweyan openness as more than the taking, adding or subtracting of viewpoints to reach some decision: its ultimate goal is to have a transformation of the views that participated in the discussion, no one gains at the expense of others.

Third, *democratic communication* is about communicating experiences and experiencing communication (Wilkinson, 2012). Dewey's understanding of communication diverges from the common understanding of communication as a technique to resolve disputes and generate transparent understandings and agreements. Dewey understands communication as a shared social endeavour (Cohen, 2012), being not only a means to achieve predetermined goals but also a moment of sharing and collaborating. For Dewey, communication is simultaneously the means and the end of democratic experiments (Pappas, 2008).

Dewey's conceptualization of communication differs from the communication techniques promoted in dispute resolution in that he suggests the possibility of participation in the creation of a collective world; the purpose of speech is thus not limited to simple production of shared mental understandings and transparent verbal agreements, it is an "interactive, experiential, and communal practice" (Cohen, 2012, p. 150). Dewey understands communication as a democratic good and democracy as "conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916[1980]).

Finally, to *accept experience as the authority* means researchers and practitioners believe in the self-sufficiency and potentialities of experimental inquiry (Pappas, 2008). For Dewey, experimental inquiry is not a formalized model, but a lived experimental activity (Dewey, 1925[1981]). It represents what the researchers and the practitioners do together, not what they assert as their findings. In this lived activity, they have to decide what to observe,

what experiments to carry on, and what arguments and lines of reasoning to pursue. Moreover, answers for these questions are continually re-considered as the research proceeds. They continually have to judge what to do next to reach the conclusion. In other words, in a democratic experimental inquiry, as the experiment unfolds, it provides the control and direction for further (Pappas, 2008). Accepting experience as the authority presupposes an implicit agreement between researchers and practitioners that experience prevails over everyone's authority or privilege (Pappas, 2008). Everyone engaged in a process of inquiry is not devoted to find out what the majority wants, but to how things really are and to follow the evidence wherever it leads.

While Dewey's behavioural practices serve as a useful guideline for how to implement democratic collaboration between academics and practitioners, there are structural and cultural barriers that may need to be addressed by academic institutions in the first instance. There has been a recent trend to employ Professors of Practice (executives turned academics) as a way to bridge management practice and research. These individuals could play a more central role in lobbying university's senior management to ensure that academics and practitioners are rewarded appropriately when they engage in democratic experiments. This will benefit both parties in terms of developing a stronger institutional relationship and with regards of the quality and usefulness of the knowledge co-created. Practitioners will start regarding academia as a welcoming and safe place in which their practical skills and contribution are valued as much as pure research.

Discussion and conclusion

This article started from the premise that the current literature has made a useful contribution to bridging the researcher-practitioner divide by suggesting different mechanisms for a more effective collaboration between researchers and practitioners. However, this literature has not addressed the principles based on which we can build

democratic relationship between them. Our paper addresses this oversight by introducing John Dewey's democratic experimentalism, a specific mode of knowledge (co) production, which goes beyond the current literature by advancing four principles for building democratic relationships between academics and practitioners. In this section, we highlight the contributions of John Dewey's democratic experimentalism to management research and to other forms of collaboration that take place in organized environments. Avenues to promote Dewey's democratic experimentalism will also be discussed along with the limitations of his approach.

The contribution of Dewey's philosophy to the controversy of academic-practitioner gap is to emphasize how these parties (should) relate to each other in the collaborative effort of co-producing knowledge. While the current perspectives suggest various mechanisms of collaboration, Dewey's democratic experimentalism highlights that when researchers and practitioners join a process of democratic experimentation, they all become producers of knowledge. There is no longer a separation between researchers' knowing theories and practitioners' knowing practical problems. However, democratic experimentation requires that we maintain the distinctions between researchers and practitioners in terms of their interests, problems, and contributions. Each individual engaged in democratic experimentation has a distinct identity and this uniqueness is emphasized and appreciated. Respecting and encouraging individuality in key in successful change management initiatives and models of planned organisational change could benefit from Dewey's democratic experimentalist ideas (see for example, Young 2009)

Dewey's philosophy does not provide a normative solution for how researchers and practitioners should behave. Instead it calls for a way of collaboration that "accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities" (Dewey, 1934[1987], p. 41).

Dewey believes that "common experience is capable of developing from within itself methods which will secure direction for itself and will create inherent standards of judgement and value" (Dewey, 1925[1981], p. 41). Senior managers should encourage forms of interaction that allow decisions and judgments to be guided by experimental inquiry. This is essential in creating a work environment in which creativity and innovation can flourish so that organisations become more pro-active and quick to react to changes in the market. This stance could also be usefully applied to the formation of partnerships amongst diverse stakeholders with opposing agendas where there is a need to resolve conflicts and find common ground (Fine, 2005).

There are, however, limitations to what can be achieved. Although Dewey's work has had a significant impact on disciplines such as public administration, education, political sciences, religion and the arts, there has been a great deal of methodological resistance in the social sciences to his ideas of democratic knowledge creation (Ryan, 1995; West, 1989). Critics have argued that his understanding of democracy is naïve and utopian. He has been criticized for his over optimistic view of how democracy can be achieved at a societal level, for not seeing power and politics as part and parcel of transformational change, whether locally enacted or on a wider scale. His methodological contributions to knowledge production have been marginalised due to elitist tendencies that still prevail in the current scientific culture which tends to elevate academic theory to a supreme position.

Moreover, in democratic experimentalism, the collaboration between researchers and practitioners takes place in a democratic context. Yet, we know that most organizational environments (including academia) are anything but democratic. In the scientific community, existing research funding and reporting rules make it difficult for practitioners to be equals when applying for research grants. Academic writing conventions are highly standardised and closely guarded by armies of journal editors to the extent that practitioners' voices are

excluded completely or to a very large extent from these communication outlets. Processes of democratic knowledge creation are seen as threatening by a large majority of academics for they imply leaving one's disciplinary paradigm behind and engaging in learning processes which may be challenging, time consuming and not valued by the establishment. Powerful gate keepers are at work to preserve the status quo of the scientific community by constructing obstacles that make it very hard if not impossible for management practitioners and ordinary people to be treated as equal to academics in the conversation of research.

Dewey's democratic experimentalism is in search of its own communities of knowing, groups that are comfortable to rely upon and refine this way of working and being in the world. Such communities need to unite various research perspectives by bringing together a variety of actors, and iterating through research phases that utilize diverse research approaches. They may need leader-mediators because there are often language and other barriers that discourage cooperation (Bartunek, 2007). Leader-mediators can be both individuals and organizations, such as the Network for Business Sustainability discussed by Bansal et al. (2012). But importantly, they do not identify themselves fully with either the academic or practitioner community, and have the courage and the interest to treat both groups as of value and as having something to contribute to the other (Bartunek, 2007)

In fact, we see small changes occurring, in that some research councils have started to experiment with allowing practitioners to be co-investigators on research grants (see for example the Connected Communities Programme which in 2014 made it possible for community partners to be co-investigators in the Legacy call) and some universities are funding research centres in which community partners and researchers are equal members (see for example the launch in 2015 of the Community Animation and Social Innovation Centre at Keele University, UK; https://www.keele.ac.uk/casic/).

To conclude, while increasing interest in knowledge co-production within the academic community is evident, we feel that more can be done to raise awareness of the possibilities offered by Dewey's democratic experimentalism and its underlying theoretical apparatus to improve the practical utility of academic research and foster democratic collaboration between academics and practitioners. Dewey's ideal of democracy thickens not only the general way of participating in producing knowledge that has been put forth by the current perspectives; it also offers a way of being and acting in the world that could be harnessed by senior managers when embarking on change management programmes.

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